

Community Impact

Truancy—Annie's Story

Annie is a bright, second grade student who has missed more than seven days of school. No notes arrive to justify her absences. Her mother, Mrs. Jones, struggles to make ends meet. She cannot afford to pay her utility bill. She sends her five young children to live with her mother outside of town until she can afford to get the electricity restored. As soon as she is able, she brings her children home, and Annie is back in school.

Too many of our youth fail to complete high school. In Richland County alone, 23% of students don't earn a high school diploma. The child who drops out is usually forever limited in work, family, and civic responsibilities. This problem affects all of us. Dropping out has been shown to lead to higher rates of single parenthood, unemployment and imprisonment.

United Way of the Midlands knows that the best way to help the most people is to focus on the underlying causes of the most serious problems. Children learn school attendance patterns early, so funding for a truancy mediation program in middle and elementary schools in Richland County School District 2 was awarded to the Community Mediation Center. During its first year, Community Mediation Center offered 65 mediations that resulted in an 88% reduction in school absences post mediation.

Annie and her mother were referred to Truancy Mediation through the Community Mediation Center. Ms. Jones explained that she was afraid to discuss the reasons for her daughter's absences with anyone at the school out of fear that they may deem her an unfit parent. After reassurances by the guidance counselor and mediator that they were not there to judge but to help, Ms. Jones shared her situation. With this knowledge, the guidance counselor was able to refer Ms. Jones to several local resources that could help her with utilities, housing, and food expenses until she could get on her feet. Annie has not missed a day of school since this mediation took place last fall.

United Way of the Midlands funds programs like the Community Mediation Center to create lasting changes in peoples' lives and the community. The program curtails school dropouts, court appearances, secure confinement of status offenders, and truancy in our community. It also supports the efforts of the SC Truancy and Dropout Prevention Initiative.

When you give to the United Way of the Midlands, it's an investment in your community...and in young people like Annie.

United Way of the Midlands is donors, partners and volunteers discovering and responding to the crucial needs of our community—then finding resources to address those needs and following up to make sure the work gets done.